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Articles in Today's Clips Friday, February 15, 2008

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<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-6
Child Care	7-9
Domestic Violence	10-12
Health Care	13
Food Assistance	14
Energy Assistance	15
Tax Assistance	16-17
Homelessness	18-21
Charities	22
News Release	23-25

*Important story at this spot

[Print Page](#)

Maple Street home raided

Thursday, February 14, 2008 11:02 AM EST

On Wednesday, Feb. 13, at approximately 9 a.m., the Cass County Drug Enforcement Team executed a search warrant on a Dowagiac home in the 400 block of Maple Street.

The Cass County Warrant Service Team made the entry while assisted by the Dowagiac Police Department.

The Dowagiac canine unit was present to assist with the search.

Located in the home was marijuana, a large amount of cocaine and more than \$300 in cash, Capt. Lyndon Parrish reported.

A 38-year-old male occupant was arrested for possession with intent to deliver cocaine and marijuana, maintaining a drug house and child abuse.

A 37-year-old female occupant was arrested for possession of marijuana, maintaining a drug house and child abuse.

Michigan Department of Human Services personnel have begun an investigation into this incident as the female subject has three children living at the residence who range from 6 to 16 years old.

Both individuals will be arraigned today, Feb. 14, in Cass County Fourth District Court, where their bond will be set.

Individuals with information pertaining to this or any crime may call the Cass County Drug Team at (269) 782-5206 or the anonymous tip line at 1-800-462-9328.



'03 rape case is back in court

Friday, February 15, 2008

By Danielle Quisenberry

dquisenberry@citpat.com -- 768-4929

A Jackson man convicted in the 2003 rape of an 11-year-old has won an appeal and had his prison sentence vacated.

But Robert Charles Hoffman, who in 2003 received what a prosecutor says was a rather forgiving plea deal, could face up to life in prison now that his case has returned to the Jackson County courts.

A hearing is scheduled today in District Court as the trial or plea process must begin again. That could be painful for the girl if she has to testify, said Assistant Prosecutor Allison Bates.

The Michigan Court of Appeals vacated Hoffman's prior conviction and sentence of at least 18 years and nine months in prison because, it said, the Jackson County Circuit Court improperly appointed an attorney to represent Hoffman despite his insistence he did not want a lawyer.

"It is difficult to fathom how defendant could improve his situation by representing himself in further proceedings.

Nevertheless, defendant is entitled to obtain relief based on the structural error that occurred in this case and to have his plea and sentence vacated," the appellate judges wrote.

In September, the Michigan Supreme Court decided not to hear the prosecutors' appeal.

Hoffman, now 41, pleaded no contest in 2003 to first-degree criminal sexual conduct and being a habitual offender. He was sentenced in January 2004 to between 18 years and nine months and 46 years and 10 months in prison -- a sentence Bates said was far lighter than it could have been.

When first charged, Hoffman, who confessed to a Jackson detective, faced two counts each of assault

with intent to murder and assault with intent to do great bodily harm, in addition to the criminal sexual conduct charge.

His court-appointed lawyer helped negotiate a deal that dropped the additional felonies in exchange for a plea, according to Bates and the court's written decision.

He also had a court-appointed appellate attorney and is now represented by defense lawyer Andrew Kirkpatrick, who is court-appointed.

The case has been costly to prosecute, Bates said, adding that she did not know how to quantify the cost.

Hoffman is accused of raping the daughter of his former live-in girlfriend, with whom he had a long and stormy relationship that forced police to make frequent calls to his home.

The girlfriend had filed a false police report against him and he concocted a plan to ruin the woman's life, Bates said in 2003.

He was accused of sexually assaulting the girl in their home and trying to kill her while her mother was working as a stripper.

When the girl's mother returned, he choked his girlfriend into unconsciousness, Bates said.

The girl and her sister and brother have since been removed from the custody of their mother, who has some substance-abuse problems, Bates said.

She said the two girls have been adopted.

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The Allegan County News

The Commercial Record



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The Plainwell & Otsego

Union Enterprise

Safe Harbor honors local volunteers

By **Ryan Lewis**
Staff Writer

Wednesday, February 6, 2008 3:41 PM EST

FENNVILLE—The Rev. Randy Smit knows child abuse can't be stopped overnight. It's too big.

But he also knows that every little bit helps.

"Often, we feel overwhelmed by the big things we can't accomplish," said Smit, assistant pastor at Douglas Community Church. "But to be able to do the small things that are possible: It's about hope."

The church was honored for giving more hope to the cause by Safe Harbor Children's Advocacy Center at an awards banquet Jan. 24.



Donna Nowak of Saugatuck peruses auction items at the Safe Harbor Children's Advocacy Center awards banquet. Her husband Tom Nowak was named Advocate of the Year. (Photo by [Ryan Lewis](#))

Roughly 30 Safe Harbor board members, law enforcement representatives, judges, lawyers, volunteers and supporters attended the event and fundraiser at journeyman caf/ in Fennville.

Douglas Community Church won one of two honors given that evening: Business/Organization of the Year.

Though unable to attend, Smit said, "We're humbled by the honor and grateful for the recognition.

"When someone receives help and they thank you, it makes a difference. It refuels the fire; it grants an awareness that what you're doing does make a difference."

The church donated \$700, proceeds from a contemporary Christian rock concert and fundraiser organized by its outreach group, The Gathering.

"We hope to expand and grow that giving. It was a start," Smit said. "We knew we wanted to do something geared toward domestic violence or underprivileged children.

After conducting a search, he and the group settled on Safe Harbor, describing the organization as slightly "undiscovered."

The help the church plans to give will not stop there. The Gathering requested a wish list of items the non-profit needs. The group also plans to participate in future Safe Harbor fundraisers.

As part of the evening, former Saugatuck educator and Court-Appointed Special Advocate Tom Nowak was honored as Volunteer of the Year.

As he accepted his award, Nowak said he'd had everything he needed growing up.

"In many ways, I've led a charmed life," the retired Saugatuck Public Schools superintendent said. "My parents were able to help me attend college. I've always been lucky. I was fortunate to have a job I liked.

"Not all children have that. Not all kids can go safely through their neighborhood."

He volunteered at Safe Harbor, he said, to help children who perhaps did not have the help of an extended family or the support structure to help them through tough times.

Safe Harbor board president Wendy Meniffee spoke as well, thanking board members for their teamwork.

"We have so many goals," she said. "But I know that with this group, we're going to get there."

She also acknowledged the leadership of Safe Harbor executive director Lori Antkoviak, who also spoke.

Antkoviak said, "I'm thankful for our staff. They've put in the effort; they've made the sacrifices."

Allegan County chief assistant prosecuting attorney Margaret Bakker recognized the collaboration between law enforcement, the courts, the Department of Human Services and justice system.

Assistant prosecutor Julie Nakfoor-Pratt described the progression of a case that spanned two years and resulted in the successful prosecution of a sex offender.

Bakker said it would not have been possible without the atmosphere of inter-agency cooperation.

"We don't function alone," she said. "The support for this collaboration in Allegan County is incredible. You won't see this elsewhere. We made it happen."

The evening also included live and silent auctions that raised \$1,300 for Safe Harbor.

Items on the auction block included drawings, jewelry and paintings by artists in Saugatuck, Fennville and Allegan, as well as prints created by Saugatuck High School art students.

Michigan Report

February 14, 2008

CHILD CARE: The House unanimously approved [SB 97](#) and [SB 155](#), which would require a child care facility that is under investigation by the Department of Human Services to inform parents of all children in the facility at the time of the alleged incident under investigation. Making a false report of an incident would also be a crime under the bills.

The chamber amended SB 155 to make it effective June 1, 2009, while SB 97 would go into effect June 1, 2008. The House also amended SB 155 to make the statutory maximum sentence variable based on the situation, while the Senate had set the max at four years.

Man gets probation in child porn case

by Paul Janczewski | The Flint Journal

Friday February 15, 2008, 1:01 PM

William C. Koske had it all.

A wife. A family. A prestigious six-digit salary as manager of General Motors distribution strategies and process at the Grand Blanc Service and Parts Operations plant.

Now, he's a jobless registered sex offender under house arrest who needs adult supervision to even visit his own grandchildren.

And all because he was found to have child porn pictures on his computer.

Koske, 54, of Grand Blanc, was sentenced to three years probation, ordered to serve six months house arrest on a tether and have no contact with anyone under age 17.

Genesee Circuit Judge Archie L. Hayman also ordered Koske to undergo sex offender therapy, pay fines and costs of about \$2,000 and stay 1,000 feet away from schools, playgrounds or other places where youngsters may congregate.

Hayman said he must also register as a sex offender and have no access to computers.

Earlier, Koske pleaded guilty to two counts of possession of child sexually abusive materials, each a 4-year felony.

In exchange for his plea, prosecutors dismissed 14 other charges, six additional counts of possession of child sexually abusive material, and eight others for using a computer to commit a crime, each a seven-year felony.

Hayman said people who seek out child porn pictures "put every child on the face of the planet at risk."

He said Koske earned a jail sentence for his actions, but his otherwise exemplary life and achievements, plus his willingness to accept responsibility and attend rehabilitation, swayed that sentence.

Hayman warned Koske that if he violates any terms of probation, a prison sentence awaits him.

"I made a huge mistake," Koske said, which embarrassed himself, his family and ended his GM career.

He vowed to avoid becoming a threat to society.

Mundy Township police began investigating Koske in October after a Fenton computer technician found pornographic images of children on the man's hard drive.

Attorney Michael P. Manley, who represents Koske, and assistant Genesee County Prosecutor Gladys Christopherson said the child porn images had nothing to do with a day care business owned by a family member.

Manley said Koske and his wife own a building leased to the Mundy Township day care, which is run by their daughter.

He said the computer was in Koske's residence, not the day care.



Woman to be tried in husband's stabbing

By ART BUKOWSKI

abukowski@record-eagle.com

TRAVERSE CITY -- It's been more than seven months since Vicki Hihnala's son died at the hands of his wife, and she's glad authorities finally issued criminal charges.

For months she's heard people say Michelle Hihnala stabbed Alan Hihnala in self-defense as he physically abused her during a July 8 argument. News that authorities planned to charge Michelle Hihnala gave her a measure of solace.

"It's very hard just to say, 'My son wouldn't have done this' and to have any credence," she said. "At least now I feel like that is being heard a little bit."

Michelle Hihnala, 27, is charged with a count of second-degree murder, a felony carrying a maximum sentence of life in prison, and a count of manslaughter, a 15-year felony. Grand Traverse County Prosecutor Alan Schneider announced the charges Thursday.

Authorities allege Hihnala stabbed her husband, 27, in the chest with a kitchen knife during an argument in the couple's George Street home in East Bay Township.

Hihnala allegedly told authorities her husband "ran into" the knife, according to a probable cause statement. A forensic pathologist later stated it is "unlikely that the fatal wound could have been inflicted as described" by Hihnala, the statement said.

Hihnala moved out of the state after the incident and is upset by the charges, said her attorney Clarence Gomery.

"I've talked to my client. She is shocked and disappointed," Gomery said. "She is living in Tennessee, and she has started a new job and a new life. To have these charges surface now after eight months is rather curious, to say the least."

Schneider wouldn't say why charges took so long or elaborate on his decision.

"I'll be happy to discuss that when the case is over," he said. "Until then, we'll do our talking in the courtroom."

In December, Schneider said he was waiting for forensic issues to be resolved before making a decision.

Gomery said Hihnala is on her way from Tennessee and will turn herself in on Monday.

"On that night she was attacked and was ... only defending herself from a drunk abuser," Gomery said. "She's going to come back and defend herself."

Vicki Hihnala said she'll never be sure what occurred the night her son died, but she's happy the facts will be examined in court.

"I'm glad a jury is going to decide what happened and what should happen," she said.

THE DAILY Reporter

[Print this story](#)

Expert testimony about 'battered wife syndrome' will not be heard in Sept. '06 murder case

[Print Page](#)

By Don Reid-Staff Writer

COLDWATER — There will be no expert testimony of the "battered wife syndrome" in the murder trial of Ana Marie Sandoval-Ceron.

Branch County Circuit Court Judge Michael Cherry ruled, after arguments Thursday, that testimony from Dr. Frioza Van Horn, Ph.D., a clinic psychologist who specialized in treating abused women, would "unfairly, impermissibly and prejudicially" impact the state's case, in turn, confusing the jury.

Sandoval-Ceron faces first degree murder for stabbing Ricardo (Ricky) Prieto, the father of her three children, to death Sept. 9, 2006, at a wedding reception of a friend. The two had been arguing and Prieto struck Sandoval-Ceron bloodying her lip.



Sandoval-Ceron

Witnesses said the woman ran into the house at Garfield and US-12, picked up the cake knife and returned to the yard, where she stuck the knife into Prieto's chest while her children looked on.

Prieto died later at the Emergency Room of Community Health Center of Branch County (CHC). The hospital's medical records director delivered hospital records in the case, under defense subpoena, to the court prior to the hearing.

Branch County Prosecutor Kirk Kashian argued that while the defense of "battered wife syndrome" might be applicable in other cases, the testimony of Dr. Van Horn, did not indicate it fit this case.

Kashian said while Prieto started the fight it broke off.

"The deceased was retreating and the defendant pursued and attacked him," Kashian said. "There was no justification for using deadly force."

Defense attorney Rhonda Ives suggested because Sandoval-Ceron had blood on her lip, the expert testimony was necessary to explain how she would feel and react. With both married to other people, Ives also said the expert would help explain why Sandoval-Ceron "even if beaten badly for years would be back with him."

Kashian argued that unlike other cases of "battered wife syndrome" the situation between the couple was "no situation of a pressure cooker, which would lead" to the stabbing

murder.

Judge Cherry stated that Dr. Van Horn's testimony at a hearing Jan. 31 was "informative, instructional and interesting" and in some circumstances would be reliable evidence, but in the current case Dr. Van Horn could not apply her opinion on "battered wife syndrome" to the facts.

The judge also said he did not rule on the issue of self-defense raised by the defense counsel. That would require the defendant be in imminent fear of serious bodily injury or death and unable to retreat.

Trial had been scheduled for this week in the Branch County Circuit Court. No new trial date has been set since the defense must yet review the medical records and must decide how to proceed after Thursday's ruling.

Sandoval-Ceron remains in the Branch County Jail, where she was taken shortly after the stabbing 17 months ago.

[Close Window](#)

[Print Page](#)

Rep. Shaffer joins health insurance coalition

Thursday, February 14, 2008 11:02 AM EST

LANSING - Cass County state Rep. Rick Shaffer announced Wednesday that Michigan will join a nationwide collaborative effort to bring health insurance and long-term financial security to the forefront of American political discussion.

"I am thrilled that Michigan is joining this very important fight," said Shaffer, R-Three Rivers.

"As a registered nurse, I have seen firsthand too many people who are going without health insurance in these tough economic days.

"It is a sad dichotomy that we live in a country that is considered a leader in the world's economy; some would refer to it as economic prosperity - and yet, we still have not been able to insure that every citizen has access to affordable health care.

"One of the barriers is because of the gridlock we see in state and federal government.

"In supporting the Divided We Fail coalition, I am happy to join a fight to find common-sense solutions to our health care access crisis like this and the effects on people's long-term financial security."

Organizations in Michigan that are taking part in the coalition include the AARP, Area Agencies on Aging Association of Michigan, Michigan Association of United Ways, Michigan Citizen Action, Michigan Disability Rights Coalition, Michigan Nurses Association, Michigan League of Human Services and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

"We must reach out and encourage a spirit of bipartisan cooperation on this issue, and ask our candidates in the upcoming elections to lay out their ideas for improving and creating access to health care coverage that will improve the quality of life for the people of Michigan," Shaffer said.

"With the kind of support that this campaign is demonstrating, I hope that in the end, those associated with Divided We Fail will be able to stand up and say 'united we succeeded.' "

Shaffer said that anyone wishing to learn more about Divided We Fail can visit <http://www.DividedWeFail.com> or <http://www.aarp.com/mi>.

Shaffer spoke at the Divided We Fail kick-off news conference in the Capitol rotunda Monday.

Divided We Fail is a nationwide collaborative effort to bring health insurance and long-term financial security to the forefront of American political discussion.

Shaffer was joined by Eric Schneidewind, president of the Michigan chapter of AARP.

Get tough on those who steal from state and poor kids

February 15, 2008

They are stealing money from taxpayers, but worse, they are taking food away from children.

So authorities ought to come down hard on anyone and everyone involved in the fraudulent buying and selling of Bridge Cards, which have replaced food stamps as currency for poor families to buy groceries. Prosecution and penalties are the best way to discourage this kind of crime, which costs the state an estimated \$55 million a year but also does incalculable damage to children going hungry because their family's food assistance is being shortchanged.

Advertisement

The costly fraud was exposed this week in a series of raids and 25 arrests, mainly at stores in Detroit and Dearborn. Authorities said adults from families on public assistance have been selling their Bridge Cards for half-value in cash to merchants who then electronically bill the state for the full amount. The cardholders then use the cash to buy stuff they can't get with the card, such as liquor, cigarettes, lottery tickets and gasoline.

Meantime, families are going without groceries and a state with serious budgetary issues and more than a tenth of its population on some form of assistance is effectively sending money for nothing to crooked businesspeople. The wonders of technology -- the ability to anonymously swipe a card and collect money from the state -- are partly responsible for the relative ease with which this scam has gone on.

But the real cause is unconscionable greed. Throw the book at 'em.

Find this article at:

<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080215/OPINION01/802150329>

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Heating things up: Eagles host BBQ for Warmth

By Rick Charmoli

LAKE CITY - This winter is shaping up to be a good one for the various resorts and businesses that depend on winter tourism.

With the constant snow fall and cold temperatures, tourists have been able to come to the area to enjoy the outdoors by snowmobiling, skiing or ice fishing. Although it has been good in terms of tourism, it also has been a winter heating season full of need.

For that reason the Fraternal Order of Eagles Lake City Post No. 3884 and the Northwest Michigan Human Services Agency are teaming up to help fill that need.

On Feb. 15, the Eagles will host a BBQ for Warmth to help raise money for the NMHSA to help families purchase heat to keep their homes warm.

Diane Campbell said due to the need this winter the funding is almost gone.

"We help low-income families with utility bills and our funding is almost gone. The people we see have already reached their cap with the Department of Human Services so they don't have many options for heat, said the NMHSA community services representative said. "The Lake City Eagles have volunteered to host the event and all proceeds will go to fund heating programs for Wexford, Missaukee and Roscommon counties."

This is the second year the Eagles have hosted the event and Eagles Auxiliary President Marcia Martinez said the group wanted to help local residents so it got involved.

"We believe in raising money and keeping it in our community. Money we raise stays in our local community," Martinez said.

In addition to the food including barbecued ribs, corn, baked potato, salad and a roll, there will be other ways to make donations, according to Campbell.

During the two-hour event, Campbell said there will be 50-50 raffles as well as a Chinese raffle.

"A Chinese raffle is where items are donated and people can buy a ticket and put it in a container in front of the item they want. At the end of the night, we draw the winner for that item," Campbell said. "We have a couple tank sets for portable propane, a scrapbook, a chips and salsa basket, remote car starter and handmade fishing lures but I'm in the market for donations."

Anyone interested in making a monetary donation or for the raffle, can contact Campbell at 775-9781.

rcharmoli@cadillacnews.com | 775-NEWS (6397)

BBQ for Warmth

- What: BBQ for Warmth
- When: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Feb. 15
- Where: Fraternal Order of Eagles Lake City Post No. 3884, 4154 M-55
- Why: It is a fund-raiser to help local families out with their heating needs.
- Information: Contact Diane Campbell at Northwest Michigan Human Services Agency at 775-9781 or the Eagles at



THE DAILY NEWS

Greenville, Belding and Montcalm County, Michigan

Thursday, February 14, 2008

Tax Help: Needy can receive free tax preparation

Luke Stier
Staff Writer

Thursday, February 14, 2008



From left, Henry Rutledge, owner of Henry's Place for Taxes in Greenville, and longtime tax accountant Michael Balars navigate a computer tax program Wednesday afternoon at EightCAP Inc. in Turk Lake. The pair are among those volunteering time to help needy people prepare their taxes.

City Village Hall. (See the accompanying box.)

The Turk Lake site is averaging 28 filers per day right now while the Greenville and Howard City locations are filing an average of 1 returns each time they're open.

"We are just filling up big time," Severance said.

While there are financial restrictions on who applies to use the free service, she explained that no one is being turned away.

"We know how the state of Montcalm County is," Severance said. "If someone needs help we aren't going to tell them no. This is for those that desperately need help."

The filing is being done electronically by local financial advisers and accountants, all volunteering their time to help those in need.

"I got on board last year," said Michael Balars of Greenville, a systems and tax accountant in the area for 24 years who's helping pre taxes every day the service is available for the second year. "It's a way of helping the people that need the help."

A total of 23 volunteers are assisting with filing tax returns this year. Most of the volunteers are from county financial institutions.

"Everything is going well and I think it is going to go smooth," Balars said.

TURK LAKE - Thousands of dollars in tax refunds will be returned to those who need it most in Montcalm County.

Those benefiting won't have to pay a cent to get their money back.

It's all part of a free tax preparation program for the needy taking place in Greenville, Howard City and Turk Lake through a joint effort between Americorps Vista, EightCAP Inc. and the United Way. This is the third year the service has been offered.

Fran Severance works with Americorps Vista through the Points of Light Foundation as the county's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) coordinator. She's excited about the potential for this year's program.

"When we first started doing this we brought back about \$10,000 in rebates," Severance said. "Last year we had \$166,000 come back and it will be a whole lot more this year."

She believes that number will grow this year is due to the addition of more tax preparation locations. Since the program's debut three years ago the only site offering the free service had been the EightCAP Annex Building in Turk Lake. This year the service also is being provided at the United Way in Greenville and Howard City Village Hall.

The service was scheduled to start last Wednesday but inclement weather pushed the first day back to Friday in Howard City. The assistance will continue through the end of tax season in mid-April.

Call 1-800-417-2622 toll-free for an appointment or for more information.

Related Links

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Volunteer to lead homeless shelter

Friday, February 15, 2008

MARK BUGNASKI / GAZETTE

Denita Perry, head cook at Ministry With Community, left, talks with Kendra Stetser Rowe, the organization's new executive director. Perry was once homeless and now has her own home.

Kendra Stetser Rowe, the new executive director of Ministry With Community, gets a hug from a member during lunch hour at the downtown agency.

Woman brings business experience to Ministry With Community

BY EMILY MONACELLI

Special to the Gazette

KALAMAZOO -- Kendra Stetser Rowe has degrees in business and law, has worked in publishing and ran her own antiques and decorating business for seven years.

On Monday, she started a new job as executive director of the Ministry With Community in downtown Kalamazoo.

"I thought they were looking for someone who essentially had already run a nonprofit, and most of my experience had been in the for-profit world, but interestingly enough, the skills you need translate pretty well," Stetser Rowe said.

Ministry with Community is a daytime shelter that provides food, shelter and other basic needs to homeless people in crisis. The organization's members can come in to take a shower, do laundry, sign up for help getting identification, have a meal or receive basic toiletries.

Ministry gives some people a starting point that wouldn't otherwise have one, Stetser Rowe said.

"If you imagine being homeless and without a job, it's almost impossible to know where to start," she said.

Ministry's longtime executive director, Judy Markusse, left the organization in August to join Kalamazoo-based Michigan Citizen Action, a nonprofit advocacy group. Markusse started as executive director at Ministry in 1996, following her mother, Dorothy Markusse, who served as the organization's first executive director.

A seven-person search committee spent six months searching for Markusse's replacement.

During the search, Ken Sarkozy, who was already affiliated with Ministry with Community, stepped up to be interim director. He did not seek the permanent position, according to Keith Peterson, Ministry with Community board vice president and head of the search committee.

The nationwide search brought back more than 100 applicants, many of them highly qualified, but they did not have the connection to Kalamazoo and to Ministry with Community that the search committee wanted.

"We wanted someone who had really strong ties to the Kalamazoo community, who knew who we were and didn't have to figure out what Ministry with Community was all about," Peterson said.

While the committee was reconfiguring its search, Stetser Rowe said she saw some of the organization's "big picture" aspects falling through the cracks. She wrote a proposal about how to improve the agency. Peterson saw her resume, and invited her to interview with the search committee. The search committee unanimously recommended her to the board of directors.

Stetser Rowe grew up in Asheville, N.C., spent some time in New York and Connecticut and moved to Kalamazoo in 2002, where her husband grew up.

In her new job, Stetser Rowe has a staff of about 20. The agency served 98,000 meals last year, and because of rising demands, officials expect to serve 100,000 this year. About 40 people take showers at the shelter daily, and about 50 people travel in the ministry's bus to employment agencies daily. It also provides a social connection.

"You can come in and have a rest and have a cup of coffee," Stetser Rowe said. "That's what I like about it."

She also likes the fact that staff members watch out for clients and, in turn, the organization's members look out for the staff.

"I look our members in the eye and that lets them know that they matter," she said. "And the irony of that is, they look me in the eye, and they let me know that I matter."

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Muskegon Chronicle

Death puts focus on bad choices, 'safety net'

Thursday, February 14, 2008

This winter has been a harsh one for many, but a cruel one for a few -- like the sister and extended family of Lonnie Gordon, a homeless man who was found frozen to death in the snow along Laketon Avenue late last month. The death, sad as it was, has at least exposed a potential hole in the community safety net.

Gordon was not the first homeless person to have died here in Muskegon, but it has definitely touched some hearts. We've heard from readers who have wondered whether anything more could have been done to save Gordon, who may have been incapable of saving himself.

The victim had been staying "off and on" at the Muskegon Rescue Mission, 400 W. Laketon. However, he apparently broke the rules of the shelter by continuing to consume alcohol, officials have said. He was then asked to leave early in the afternoon of Jan. 29, as most Rescue Mission residents are each afternoon when weather is decent. He was last seen by his friends, according to police, around 7 p.m. that same night.

Between then and the time his body was discovered in a snowbank between 9 and 10 a.m. the following morning, his whereabouts are still somewhat of a mystery. However, his cause of death was perfectly clear to investigators: "He died from hypothermia -- prolonged exposure to the cold," said Muskegon Detective Capt. Mark Lewis.

The Rescue Mission bears no blame here. Under its "cold weather policy," Gordon could have returned that night to sleep there despite his earlier infraction. For whatever reason, he chose not to.

The Rescue Mission's rules are in place for a good reason -- so that order can be maintained among residents who have reached a point in time where their options are limited.

An eyewitness reported seeing a man on the morning of Jan. 30 "who looked very cold" standing near the corner of Laketon Avenue and Barclay Street not long before Gordon was found, but near where his body was recovered. Gordon was dressed inappropriately for the weather, without gloves and had been drinking.

Gordon was apparently a victim of his own actions, yet we wonder if his life could have somehow been saved. Should there be mandatory notification of relatives in situations like these? Should law enforcement authorities have been called in? If so, under what circumstances?

We know there are no easy answers, but we shouldn't miss an opportunity to strengthen our community's "safety net" when it presents itself by asking how we might do better for all of our residents, even the homeless ones.

It's worth few extra minutes shoveling

Shoveling out your driveway can save you the unpleasantness of getting your car stuck. Shoveling out your neighborhood fire hydrant may save your life.

That's the message area fire departments are putting out this week following yet another blast of cold and snowy weather. The huge piles are waist- and even shoulder-high in some areas. Streets are increasingly harder to navigate.

Yet it is all too easy to forget about the hydrant closest to your house. As the snow piles up, it doesn't create a magic clear patch around your hydrant. The big plows that clean your streets also add to the growing drifts around the big yellow pipe.

Remember, though, that in an emergency seconds count. If the fire department has to respond to an alarm in your neighborhood, crew members may have to spend precious minutes digging out the hydrant closest to the emergency. Those minutes could mean the difference when lives and property are at stake.

Fires can break out anywhere, at any time. So it is vital to extinguish the destructive flames as quickly as possible. A snowed-in hydrant complicates rescue efforts. So spend a few extra minutes shoveling out your area hydrant. Believe our firefighting professionals when they tell you it is time and effort well spent.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Project Linus makes blankets, afghans for children

Friday, February 15, 2008

Monarch Quilts will be involved in a separate effort - Project Linus - which will have a blanket-making day Saturday at the Genoa Township quilt store.

Also an all-volunteer effort, Project Linus members provide handmade, blankets and afghans to children in crisis. Anyone is welcome to help Saturday and sewing experience is not a requirement. The project will run 10 a.m.-5 p.m. at Monarch Quilts, 2100 Grand River Annex, Suite 200. Details: 248-789-7040; on the Web at www.orgsites.com/mi/howell-project-linus.

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Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

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Regina Funkhouser, MI Heart Gallery Coordinator (800) 589-6273

Michigan Heart Gallery Grand Opening Public views professional portraits of Michigan foster children who are waiting for adoption

Feb. 14, 2008

This Valentine's Day consider giving your heart to a child who is waiting and hoping for a permanent family to call his or her own.

Many of us take being part of a family for granted. A family provides the simplest comforts like having someone who cares where you are and asks, "How was your day?"

Unfortunately, more than 4,000 Michigan children do not have families and are waiting to be adopted. Many of these children are among the hardest to place in adoptive homes — children who are older, members of minorities and/or sibling groups, have medical issues, or need special help.

Some of these children are featured in a heart-warming photographic touring exhibit called the Michigan Heart Gallery. Today, the Michigan Heart Gallery kicked off its 2008 exhibit at the Lansing Capitol Rotunda. This year's grand opening celebration featured a multimedia presentation and several speakers, including First Gentleman Daniel G. Mulhern and Kate Hanley, Michigan Department of Human Services director of permanency division.

The Michigan Heart Gallery, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network and the Michigan Department of Human Services, seeks to bring our community closer

to the faces and voices of children waiting for a forever family. The Michigan Heart Gallery features portraits of Michigan's waiting children who come from various regions of the state and are representative of different races and ages. The Michigan Heart Gallery is in its third year. Throughout 2008, the exhibit will travel to various locations across the state. Most of the children featured in the Heart Gallery have been waiting a long time to find a permanent family.

"While we hope children featured in the exhibit will find families, the larger goal of the Heart Gallery is to inspire prospective parents to adopt an older child, so children do not leave the foster care system without having a lasting connection to a supportive adult," Hanley said. "We know from experience if these children are not seen, and if we do not educate the public about older children who need families, then they may be forgotten."

Some Heart Gallery children are now teenagers. Each year, about 500 Michigan children, ages 18–21, "age out" of the foster care system. These youths do not have a home for the holidays, family at their wedding, or a family safety net. Recruitment activities such as the Heart Gallery encourage prospective parents to adopt an older child so these children can have a vital connection to a supportive adult during adolescence and beyond. The Heart Gallery exhibit also includes several photos of adoptive families. This year, portraits of three families who have opened their hearts and homes to children from the foster care system are featured.

The photographs in the Heart Gallery were taken by more than 40 professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery allows these children to be seen in an artistic, poignant and tasteful photographic exhibit. The children thoroughly enjoyed their photo shoot experience. Some children were able to help select which portrait to feature in the Heart Gallery, while others came up with their own poses and some were given lessons in photography during the photo shoot, allowing them to become budding photographers themselves.

The Heart Gallery concept was initially founded by the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department in 2001 as a way to help foster children in protective custody who are waiting for adoptive families find the families

they desire. Since 2001, the Heart Gallery has expanded to dozens of states and cities.

For more information about the Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call (800) 589-6273 or visit the Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at www.miheart.org

For more information on adoption and foster care, go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

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